

I Have a Collection and Exhibit of Specialized Material What Do I Do with this Stuff after an Exhibit?

I landed at a place when I thought my exhibit was finished. Prior to that time, I had had fourteen months of doing nothing else but working on my first serious traditional exhibit: “Revolutionary Martyrs of the Kuomintang”. I was exhausted, but happy. The first showing brought many kind comments from judges, dealers, collectors, and visitors who did not collect stamps; new friendships were formed.

I realized I had other specialized material that might expand my exhibit at a later date. There was other material that could not be used because it would be considered “padding”, a term judges use to suggest the exhibitor is showing the same material repeatedly to fill frames (you can’t do that). But what is next? The medal level I received was the highest I could expect for a 3-frame exhibit. My contacts and resources for additional material became exhausted, so was my allowance, and my honey-do list was incredibly long.

Exhibits do not represent the end of the line for a stamp collector. Instead, they open new doors for opportunity. One of the advantages of exhibiting at APS/WSP shows is the kindness offered by members of clubs that host annual shows that offer exhibits. I cannot express enough kindness about the folks at the Omaha Show and the Oklahoma show (OKPEX), two I try to attend and exhibit in every year. At these shows, it’s not just the exhibiting, it’s the connectivity!

I made many friends, was invited to dinners hosted by these clubs for dealers, judges, and exhibitors. I met people who liked my work enough to single me out and ask questions about my material. Some of them are not stamp collectors. At one show, the wife of an Omaha Stamp Club member invited her language teacher (she was studying Chinese) to come see my exhibit. I could barely understand the teacher, but she could understand some of the material in my exhibit. I was amazed at the number of non-philatelic folks who took interest in what I was doing. While driving back to Kansas City, I realized that a Club Exhibiting Program was very much needed. The result of that show, along with local club members who showed excitement about my ideas for a new exhibiting format, is why the MPS has the program we now enjoy.

It was easy to reflect on APS/AAPE exhibiting from past experiences and see how many were unintentionally excluded; others were disappointed in rigid rules and guidelines. Many who might enjoy this aspect of philately were not going to try. A portion of an article published by the AAPE says:

“Through exhibiting you are also making many new friends and contacts. Exhibiting unlike any other aspect of the hobby (be it philately or deltiology) is one of the most enjoyable and satisfying experiences we can have. Not only are you learning more about your material, you are sharing with many other like-minded collectors as well as advertising our hobby to perfect strangers who might be moved to collect a new area for themselves. Organized shows are made up of very outgoing personalities who, like you, are inquisitive and intelligent people. Some of the most interesting people in the world attend these shows and partake in exhibiting. You will soon find out that it isn’t only stamps and postcards that you have in common.”

I could not have penned those statements with any greater degree of accuracy. But, what about those that cannot travel to shows? What about collectors who have interesting material but limited budgets to

support them? Some want to exhibit but don't know where to begin? Where do they get information? Where did I get mine? Others fear exhibiting because of all the boogie-man stories told to them by exhibitors who were frustrated or dissatisfied with the medal they received or comments made to them by a judge.

My first experience with exhibiting was awful! I had recently left the U.S. Navy after serving ten years, returned to college, joined the local stamp club, and discovered I was the new president... not to mention our annual show, which was a WSP event, and was scheduled three months later. I was expected to exhibit, had never done it, knew nothing about it, and could not afford it. A nice collection of U.S. Telegraph Stamps, along with some on telegrams and a few unexploded booklets fell into my hands (club members who had the material but would not help put on the show).

The show came. One judge, a retired Major from the U.S. Army tore into me like I had committed a crime, was worthless, and had no business exhibiting. I agreed. In fact, I was so irritated I didn't exhibit again for 35 years. The only good that came of that show was an offer to buy my exhibit for \$20 more than I paid for the material, and as a college student in the early 1980s, thought that was a good deal. I collected, but was so annoyed at that judge, I had no desire to learn what was wrong with my exhibit, or why. I continued to aggressively collect stamps, but there was no room for exhibiting.

Ahah! I'll develop a program called Club Exhibiting which gets back to the basics of telling a story. There will be on rules to restrict creativity, or paid professionals to judge exhibits. In fact, let club members vote on what they like and use a ballot system for voting. If successful, exhibitors will advance to the APS/WSP shows and keep the fire fueled! If not, they will continue exhibiting at the club level and work to improve it for everyone through participation. What if one club unites with another from area clubs to share the program, and the frames, and folks from these various clubs interact. What if APS learned what we were doing and thought it might be good for the rest of the nation!

Here's more opportunity. Did you ever want to give a presentation at a club meeting but did not have material to present? If you have an exhibit, you have a presentation! Let another club member scan your pages and put them into a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation. Have you ever been inspired to write articles for a philatelic journal? You have an exhibit. Why not tell others what you learned... that's an article. And, it's not beyond reason to have so much fun that you could not consider exhibiting at an international show. These are some of the avenues you might consider in years to come. One exhibitor asked me what he should do next. An exhibit is not something done once then done away with. You grow an exhibit like a business owner grows a company; at your pace, within your means, and when, or what you decide to do.

Smart dealers get to know exhibitors. They remember what type of material exhibitors may be looking for. You might get a tap on the shoulder at a show, or a phone call letting you know that something you want for your exhibit is available. However, let's be fair and understand that a dealer's price tag usually goes up when they know how bad you want what they have. Collectors remember what you are exhibiting and some go through their material looking for material that might help you. Since the middle of last year, three MPS members "gave" me covers that are now in my 5-frame exhibit planned for show later in 2012.

Some exhibitors enjoy the thrill of competition and receive great satisfaction when awards are presented to them. Sometimes the awards they receive are higher than expected, at other shows they are not. And, just when you think there is nothing to strive for, you may be given an unexpected award that makes the rain go away and sun shine. Just don't get caught up in awards being the purpose for exhibiting. Remember, it's the story, the story, the story!